**CREATING EMOTIONAL APPEALS: PATHOS SUPERHIGHWAYS**

When crafting an argument, one way to help make your point and win over your readers is to make them feel something. If you can tug on the heartstrings, you can often accomplish much more than you even can by simple logic. Unfortunately, logic is more subjective than one might think as our pasts, our prejudices, and our beliefs can shade our logic. Where logic fails, emotions can step in and do the extra heavy-lifting.

**#1: Select Emotional Themes and Points**

You always have choices to make about which points to include. Some points need emotional appeals more than others. Be sure that some of them carry emotional power.

**Example**: Suppose you have identified fifteen reasons why your audience should consider public speaking training. But you don’t want to explain in detail or make emotional appeals to every single one; that would not be effective but instead would be overwhelming. Which do you choose? “*Conquer your public speaking fear*” probably evokes stronger emotions than “*Learn to speak with more precision.”*

**#2: Choose Words which Add Emotional Emphasis**

Some words are emotionally neutral, while some are emotionally charged. Exercise judgment to select the words which fit the emotional tone that works to your advantage. A well-chosen word placed in a very strategic moment can really have an emotional impact.

**Example**: Consider the difference in words used to label a suicide bomber on opposing sides of a political war. What emotion does the label “*terrorist*” evoke? What is the difference between a word like “*hero*” and “*martyr*”? Which one would best complement your purpose?

**#3: Use Rich Analogies and Metaphors**

Analogies, metaphors, and other figures of speech not only make your speech more interesting, but often allow you to make an emotional connection by tapping into emotions already felt by your audience.

**Example**: If you speak about gang violence, you might plainly state that “*We have a*problem*in our city…*” On the other hand, you might say “*We have a* **cancer***in our city…*” The latter analogy draws on your audience’s pre-existing feelings about cancer, and makes them want to eradicate the cause.

**#4: Tell Stories**

Stories are often the quickest path to the greatest emotional connection with your audience. Carefully crafted stories allow you to evoke any of a wide range of emotions. This may explain why stories are often the most memorable components of your writing. Plus they appeal to the readers’ logic and establish you as someone who knows what you’re talking about, someone credible who has “been there.” Stories are the triple whammy. But a fake story, one that is not genuine or appropriate, will have the exact opposite effect, will make readers annoyed, will show a lack of logic, and will deteriorate your credibility—so make sure it’s a good one.

**#5: Use Humor**

Humor is closely related to storytelling because you usually arrive at humor through stories. Nonetheless, humor merits special mention. Humor evokes emotions such as joy and surprise, and often triggers secondary emotions such as calmness and friendship. If your audience is laughing, they are having fun. If they are having fun, they are happy to be listening to you and they are attentive. As an added boost, humor makes your audience like you (at least for a moment), and that boosts your ethos too.

Nearly every argument would benefit from more humor. How can you add humor to yours?

**#6: Connect through Description**

Creating a visual element through specific, graphic words opens emotional pathways than abstract words alone.

**Examples**: Consider the following pairs, and ask yourself which creates the stronger emotional impact:

* *Saying* that “smoking damages lung tissue” versus *Showing* tar-like lung tissue through a description
* *Claiming* that cords from window blinds pose a risk to children versus *Showing* with a description of the pain someone would experience when being strangled.

**ADDITIONAL PATHS TO DEVELOP EMOTIONAL APPEALS**

Now that you are familiar with the core tools of pathos, we can sample some of the additional tools at the disposal of a skilled writer. Many of these build on top of the core building blocks above.

**1: Analyze Your Audience**

Without doing any audience analysis at all, you always know two things:

1. Everyone in your audience is human.
2. Most humans share many emotional triggers.

As a result, you can always achieve moderate success applying the first seven tools.

But to hit a pathos home run, you’ve got to analyze your target audience. You are not trying to argue to convince those who already agree with you but those who are inclined to disagree, so you need to know who they are and WHY they disagree. Do they tend to be old or young? Technical or non-technical? Male or female? Rich or poor? Liberal or conservative? These and many other factors will impact which emotional triggers will have the strongest impact.

Analyzing your audience is crucial for crafting appropriate emotional appeals.

**2: Evoke Surprise (in the Introduction and elsewhere)**

A great way to connect immediately with your audience is to start with a surprise. I admit there’s no logical reason to suggest that an introduction with a surprise will be more persuasive. But, we’re not talking logic here. A surprise gets your audience *excited*. Getting them excited makes them listen.

Surprise can be effective elsewhere, particularly as the length of your argument grows. Like curiosity, your audience is motivated to act on the surprise. How? They try to resolve how this surprising element *fits* with the rest of the presentation. To do that, they have to listen. Creating this *cognitive dissonance* makes your audience struggle to make what they already know fit what they just read. They will keep reading just to make that happen.

Note that I’m not talking about deliberately *confusing* your audience. Surprise is planned, and is usually followed quickly by an explanation. Confusion, on the other hand, results from poor planning, and will have the opposite effect: you will lose your audience.

**3: Use Vivid, Sensory Words**

Tool #2 above advised the use of emotional words. One way to do this is to concentrate on concrete, vivid, sensory words. When you use sensory words, your audience feels emotions they have associated with those words.

**Example**: When you mention “the touch of your father’s flannel shirt” or “the aroma of your grandmother’s kitchen,” you’ve done more than just mention fabric and smells. You have evoked emotions which, depending on your audience, probably include loving memories of childhood.

**4: Be Authentic**

Remember that the goal of pathos is to connect with the audience and *share* emotions with them.

To share an emotion, you’ve got to feel it too.

Pathos is not about tugging emotional strings as if you were a puppeteer. You get zero marks for that. Actually, you get negative marks for that, because your ethos gets destroyed when the audience realizes you are toying with them.

Be honest. Share your presentation in a way that your audience will feel as passionately as you feel.

**5: Match Your Tone to the Emotion**

Tone is one clear clue to how you feel about what you are saying. Your tone, pace, and other prose qualities should mirror your emotions.